SEMAPHORE

THE RAN BAND ASHORE AND AFLOAT

The Royal Australian Navy (RAN) Band is a ceremonial unit of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) tasked with the mission of 'promoting the RAN', and in fulfilling this mission, it continues a proud tradition of providing ceremonial, musical and public relations support in Australia and overseas. Its musicians promote awareness in the wider community of Navy's critical contribution to the nation and maintain one of the RAN's most consistent and significant public engagement profiles.

Music has had a long and distinguished association with the military, the band of the British Grenadier Guards having been formed over 300 years ago, and the Royal Marine bands 239 years ago. Although not sharing the same historical background as these British counterparts, the origins of the RAN Band can be traced back to the various bands of the colonial naval forces prior to Federation. The band of the Victorian Naval Brigade was a well known musical unit in the Melbourne area during the late 19th century. Indeed, this band journeyed to China in 1900 on the eve of Federation as part of the naval contingent that assisted in quelling the Boxer Uprising,[1] and was officially farewelled by the bluejacket New South Wales Naval Brigade Band. Later, the band of the Victorian Naval Brigade was also present as part of the Commonwealth Naval Force Band when the United States Navy's 'Great White Fleet' sailed into Port Phillip Bay in 1908.

Some months prior to the commissioning of HMAS *Australia* (I) at Portsmouth on 21 June 1913, six musicians from Melbourne were sent to England to join up with a number of ex-Royal Marine and British Army bandsmen. These musicians, who formed the first band of the infant Royal Australian Navy, arrived back in Sydney aboard *Australia* (I) on 4 October 1913. From the outset, the Band was dressed in a uniform very similar to that of the uniform of the Royal Marines of the period, and their appearance at ceremonial parades greatly enhanced the spectacle.[2]

A second band was formed in 1927 for Flinders Naval Depot, now HMAS *Cerberus*. This band consisted of permanent musicians assisted by volunteers from all branches within the depot. In the late 1930s, there was a rapid expansion in musician recruitment with a total of five bands at sea, serving in the cruisers HMA Ships *Australia* (II), *Canberra* (I), *Hobart* (I), *Perth* (I) and *Sydney* (II), in addition to bands in shore establishments.

During World War II, musicians served in all theatres of war and, naturally, their operational responsibilities including complementing guns crews, handling shells in magazines, working in transmitting stations, assisting first aid parties and acting as lookouts through day and night watches, became the focus of their shipboard routine. They took the same risks as their shipmates and were among those who lost their lives in the sinking of *Sydney*

(II). After World War II, all musicians were posted to *Cerberus*, where in 1951 the RAN School of Music was formed. At the same time, a boy/junior musician scheme was inaugurated for the recruitment of boys over the age of fifteen and a half years.

Figure 1: RAN Band members manning damage control stations (RAN)

Bands were again posted to sea in the early 1950s and musicians saw action aboard the aircraft carrier HMAS *Sydney* (III) in Korean waters in 1953, patrolled Malayan waters during the Malayan Emergency, and performed two concert tours of Vietnam during the early 1970s. By 1973, the only band remaining afloat was serving aboard HMAS *Melbourne* (II), and this band transferred to HMAS *Stalwart* (II) on the decommissioning of *Melbourne* in mid-1982. In October 1984, the Defence Force School of Music opened in Simpson Barracks, Victoria and took over the training of all Navy and Army musicians. As a consequence, the RAN School of Music ceased operating in 1985 and the junior musicians' scheme was also abolished. Shortly afterwards women were recruited into the Band for the first time.

Today the RAN Band consists of two major detachments of full-time musicians stationed in Sydney at HMAS *Kuttabul* and in Melbourne at HMAS *Cerberus*, while a third detachment consists of reserve members stationed in Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Hobart and Perth. All Band members are required to perform in the main ceremonial ensemble of their individual detachments. However, to ensure versatility, other specialty capabilities are also maintained including a wind orchestra in Sydney, a concert band in Melbourne, as well as wind chamber ensembles, a show band and small jazz combinations in each detachment.

Since 2002, the Band has re-established links with the fleet through regularly embarking small elements of

musicians in ships departing on deployments. The RAN Band's operational role during such deployments is to entertain deployed ADF forces, as well as to add value to the fleet's engagement profile ashore. While embarked, band members are employed in a variety of roles, including general duties in the galley/cafeteria and laundry parties, as lookouts on the bridge, on the helm and as members of the ship's force protection teams. For instance, during Operations SLIPPER and FALCONER the musicians worked as members of flight deck teams in HMAS *Kanimbla* (II).

Ship/Tour	RAN Band contribution
HMAS *Kanimbla*	5 musicians - Operation RELEX II (2002)
HMAS *Sydney*	8 musicians – North East Asian Deployment (NEAD) 2002
HMAS *Kanimbla*	4 musicians - Operation SLIPPER and Operation FALCONER (2003)
HMAS *Adelaide*	8 musicians - South East Asian Deployment (2003)
HMAS *Warramunga*	8 musicians - South West Pacific (SWPAC) Deployment 2003
HMA Ships *Tobruk* & *Arunta*	7 musicians - NEAD (2003)
FACE Tour de Force	17 musicians - Operation CATALYST (2003-04)
Anzac Day	15 musicians – Anzac Cove (2004) 1 musician – Baghdad (2004)
HMAS *Parramatta*	4 musicians – Exercise RIMPAC 2004
HMAS *Anzac*	8 musicians - NEAD (2004)
HMAS *Tobruk*	8 musicians - SWPAC Deployment (2004)
HMAS *Anzac*	8 musicians - Operation NORTHERN TRIDENT (2005)
FACE Tour de Force	15 musicians - Operation ANODE (2005)
HMAS *Kanimbla*	10 musicians for a short visit to Broome (2005)
HMAS *Stuart*	8 musicians - SWPAC Deployment (2005)
FACE Tour de Force	19 musicians - Operation CATALYST (2005-06)
HMAS *Tobruk*	11 musicians – South East Asian Deployment (2006)
HMAS *Manoora*	12 musicians – Exercise RIMPAC 2006 (2006)
FACE Tour de Force	3 musician technicians – Operation Catalyst (2006)

Table 1: RAN Band sea and operational deployments June 2002 to August 2006

The deployment of 17 musicians to the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO) during Christmas 2003, and a further 19 musicians for Christmas 2005, as part of the musical Tour de Force sponsored by the Forces Advisory Council on Entertainment (FACE), demonstrated to Australian and coalition forces the calibre of the RAN's musicians and the Band's musical capability. During Anzac Day 2004, the band had 15 musicians at Anzac Cove and one of its buglers performed for the dawn service in Baghdad, Iraq. More recently, 15 musicians participated in another FACE tour; this time to the Solomon Islands in support of ADF and Australian Federal Police personnel committed to Operation ANODE. While in the Solomon Islands, the musicians presented a concert to an audience of more than 20,000 Solomon Islanders.

In Australia each year, the RAN Band completes more than 500 performances with audience numbers in the hundreds of thousands.[3] Importantly, the RAN Band is able to keep Navy's image alive in communities far removed from any naval presence. Tasks range from supporting local community groups and ex-service associations to supporting ceremonial, public relations and social activities for the wider naval family. For example, in June 2003 the Maritime Commander commented that the presence of the RAN Band at welcome home and departure ceremonies for RAN ships deploying to, and returning from, overseas operations 'has been superb, and added immeasurably to the importance of those occasions for our people and their loved ones.'[4]

The RAN Band has performed at the Royal Tournament and in Disneyland, on the shores of Gallipoli, at the Pope's summer palace (Castel Gandolfo) and in the 'Big Egg' Stadium in Japan, while supporting RAN diplomatic activities and military operations overseas. The band also played a leading role during the Melbourne 1956 and Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.

Figure 2: Ceremonial Sunset in HMAS Anzac, *Goa, 2005* (RAN)

Recent ceremonies that highlighted the importance of maintaining naval music were the repatriation ceremony, funerals, and national thanksgiving service to honour those lost in the crash of the RAN's Sea King SHARK 02, while providing humanitarian relief as part of Operation SUMATRA ASSIST II. In carrying out these and other ceremonial functions, such as commissioning and decommissioning ceremonies, today's RAN Band continues the fine tradition established by the bluejacket bands; however, instead of playing 'Sons of the Sea' as was the case in 1900, today's musicians perform popular tunes such as 'I am Australian' and 'Waltzing Matilda.'

The performance of these duties, and many others like them, have firmly established the reputation of the RAN Band and demonstrated that its time-honoured traditions continue to be proudly upheld by its members today.

1 B. Nicholls, *Blue Jackets and Boxers*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1986, p. 45.
2 The band changed to the RAN sailor's uniform in 1960 after the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games where the RAN Band's imaginative marching display during the opening ceremony was credited to the Australian Army, due to the similarities in the respective uniforms. This uniform change ensured that the Band became clearly recognised as the musical ambassadors of the Senior Service.
3 RAN Band, *Annual Report 2004/2005*, July 2005, pp. 4-6.
4 Royal Australian Navy, *RAN Band News*, Issue Number 2 of 14 July 2003, p. 4. Internet <navy.gov.au/ranband/documents/>